



Ovarian cancer: What is this silent killer?

Ovarian cancer originates from cells in the ovaries that grow and divide uncontrollably. The cells may grow to form a tumor on the ovaries; cells can also break off from this main tumor and spread to other parts of the body. Although ovarian cancer can spread throughout the entire body, in most cases, it remains in the pelvic and abdominal organs, such as the uterus, intestines, live and bowel.

Symptoms of ovarian cancer

- Discomfort in the lower abdomen.
- Abdominal swelling and/or pain; bloating and/or a feeling of fullness.
- Vague but persistent gastrointestinal complaints, such as gas, nausea and indigestion.
- Frequency and/or urgency of urination, and frequent urinary tract infections.
- Constipation.
- Menstrual disorders, such as abnormal bleeding or postmenopausal bleeding.
- Unexplained tiredness and fatigue.
- Loss of appetite.
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing.
- Unexplained weight loss and/or weight gain.
- Sudden stomach “blows up” resembling pregnancy.

Statistics

In the year 2005, approximately 30,000 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer, with 15,000 dying.

Ovarian cancer usually appears after the age of 60. About 50% of patients are over 65, although it can appear in younger women at high risk.

Race does not play a factor, as it does in other types of cancer.

Facts about ovarian cancer

Often there are no symptoms in the early stages, and in many cases the cancer has spread by the time it is found.

It is important for women to pay attention to vague symptoms that persist longer than the length of time it would take for a normal flu (3 to 4 weeks) to subside.

Risk factors

- High fat diet.
- Never having children.
- Infertility, or not having children until late in life.
- Use of infertility drugs without becoming pregnant.
- Initial period at a young age, or menopause at an older than average age.
- Use of talcum powder in the genital area.
- Family history of ovarian or breast cancer.

Factors that can lower your risk

- Having multiple children.
- Breastfeeding.
- Using birth control pills.
- Having a tubal ligation (sterilization).

What to do if you have a family history of ovarian cancer

The Gilda Radner Familial Ovarian Cancer Registry recommends that women who have at least one close relative with ovarian cancer have a pelvic examination and a vaginal ultrasound to look for ovarian tumors, and a blood test called the CA-125, which may detect early ovarian cancer, every six months.

The CA-125 Blood Test

This is a test to measure the level of CA-125 in the blood, as an indicator of ovarian cancer. The CA-125 level often increases when cancer of the ovaries is present, but other conditions can also cause increased levels, including pregnancy, menstruation and some non-ovarian cancers. The test does not distinguish between malignant and benign tumors and is best used with other cancer tumor markers.

NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER RESOURCE INFORMATION

The Gilda Radner Familial Ovarian Cancer Registry

1-800-OVARIAN
(1-800-682-7426)
www.ovariancancer.com



American Cancer Society

1-800-227-2345
www.cancer.org



National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service

1-800-4-CANCER
(1-800-422-6237)
<http://cis.nci.nih.gov>



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Dear Friend,

Ovarian cancer will strike an estimated 23,000 U.S. women and cause approximately 14,000 deaths this year. It ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women and is often referred to as the silent killer, because it causes very few symptoms. The risk of ovarian cancer increases with age, and family history of the disease is a significant risk factor. Human papilloma virus (HPV), a sexually transmitted disease, is responsible for about 70 percent of cervical cancers.

A new vaccine that protects against HPV has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In a two-year study involving more than 12,000 women, the vaccine was found to be 100 percent effective against several types of HPV.

I encourage you to learn more about ovarian cancer by talking with your physician or gynecologist. If you have any of the risk factors for ovarian cancer, ask to be tested. Please do not make the mistake of waiting until symptoms develop.

For more information on health and healthcare, please visit the Resources page of my website, <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a18>.



Sincerely,

MARY HAYASHI

Assemblymember, 18th District

Ovarian Cancer

the best
protection
is early
detection

